

FY23 ANNUAL REPORT

July 2022-June 2023

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ABOUT US

We believe in the power and potential of all young people. We provide engaging programming, connection to resources and holistic case management to youth in Maryland's communities. Our primary goal is to reduce the number of Black and Latinx young people in the youth legal system in Maryland. Our evidence-informed model seeks to dismantle racist structures and, instead, employ strengths-based approaches focused on positive relationships and self-agency. These guiding principles are essential in addressing racial inequities at an individual and systemic level.



Vision

Envisioning communities where youth make choices that strengthen their lives, their families, and their world.

Mission

Strengthening communities through innovative, family-focused strategies that connect youth to opportunities for positive choices.

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



Transitions was the theme of this year: on UMBC's campus, at Choice's Baltimore City-based social enterprises, and across Maryland.

I am happy to share that after a year of serving as interim director of The Shriver Center, Vice Provost Chris Steele, Ph.D offered me the opportunity to serve as executive director of public service programs of the Shriver Center. With the goal of offering an innovative alternative to sole directorships, I will co-lead The Shriver Center with Assistant Vice Provost Joby Taylor, Ph.D.

This was a bittersweet year for myself as well as The Choice Program. With the retirement of President Freeman A. Hrabowski III, not only did we lose our biggest supporter, but I lost an on-campus mentor and partner in the struggle for civil rights for young people. My worry quickly turned to excitement after meeting our new leader, President Valerie Sheares Ashby. President Sheares Ashby arrived at UMBC from Duke University. Like UMBC, Duke was one of the first ten campuses to adopt Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (TRHT), an initiative of the American Association of Colleges and Universities. From Day One, The Choice Program has had her support. Within her first semester, she visited our office in the historic Cherry Hill to gain a greater understanding of our services.

As you will learn on Page 9, we rebranded our social enterprises. What was formerly Flying Fruit became Rysing Youth. This was an intentional process that involved the Youth Advisory Board, program participants, UMBC marketing experts, and other stakeholders. We partnered with Taharka Brothers, a Baltimore-based ice cream business with whom we are mission aligned. This allowed us to simplify products sold at Oriole Park at Camden Yards and the Inner Harbor. We are extremely proud to offer opportunities for young people at both ends of Conway Street. When the Orioles elected to change food vendors from Delaware North to Levy Restaurants, our jobs team quickly forged a new partnership with Levy and acclimated.

I was honored to serve on Governor Moore's transition team as a part of his Public Safety Executive Committee. This allowed me to meet with leaders from across the state to share ideas and best practices to make our neighborhoods safer. Lastly, with the transition at Governor, we wished long-time supporter Secretary Sam Abed of Department of Juvenile Services farewell while welcoming new secretary Vincent Shiraldi. Secretary Shiraldi shares some of our youth development values. We look forward to partnering with him and the agency to disentangle Maryland youth from the legal system.

Eric Ford

Executive Director, Public Service Programs at The Shriver Center

YEAR AT A GLANCE



594

young people and their
families served throughout
central Maryland

INTENSIVE ADVOCACY/ DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE SERVICES

The Choice Program's intervention addresses racial and ethnic disparities in the youth legal system. The current system, a legacy of racial segregation and overpolicing, prevents young people of color from enjoying childhood, growing through adolescence into adulthood.

Maryland's Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) refers a young person to Choice. Throughout their tenure with us, staff mentors meet youth and their families in-person in their homes, schools, and communities and also virtually. Choice supports youth in creating and attaining individualized goals that bolster their personal success. Additionally, Choice provides crisis intervention, legal and educational advocacy, systems navigation, and connections to community-based resources. Choice offers enrichment, athletic, and recreational programming in community-based workshops and events, as well as on two college campuses (UMBC and Loyola University).

We believe that young people thrive when they have access to supportive resources and are able to contribute to and connect with their communities.

In FY23,



336

young people and
their families served



7,937

interactions with
young people



1,975

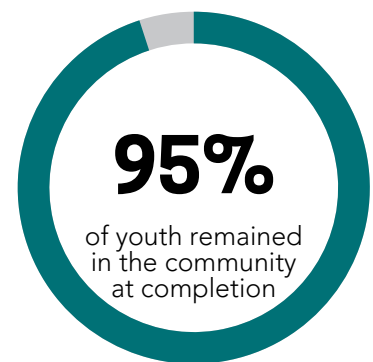
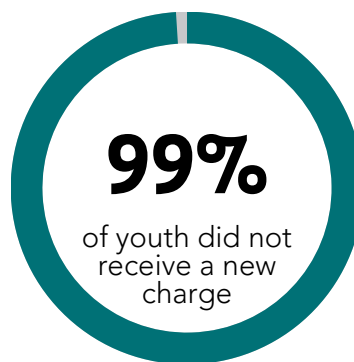
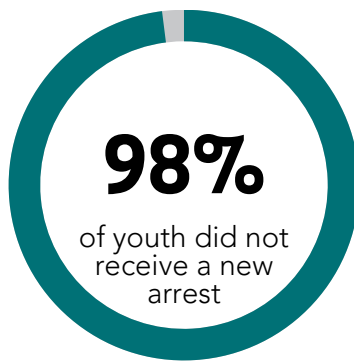
times youth attended
enrichment activities

Intensive Advocacy Outcomes and Deliverables

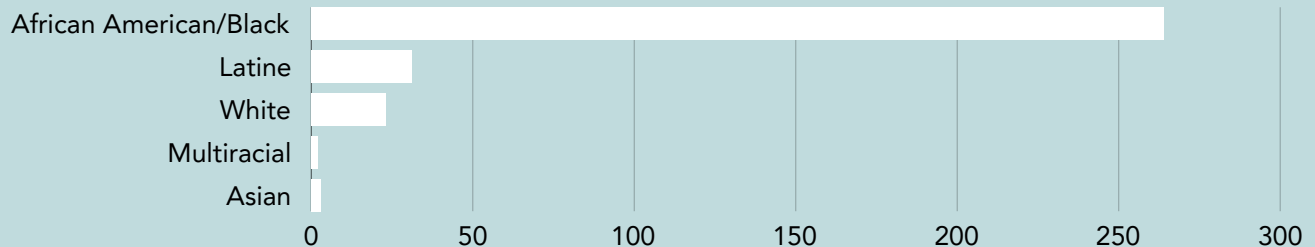
Choice's Intensive Advocacy Program is supported by a contract with the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS). The expectation is that Choice mentors and youth will achieve the following goals:

70% of youth will not receive a new arrest
 70% of youth will not receive a new charge
 70% of youth will remain in the community at completion

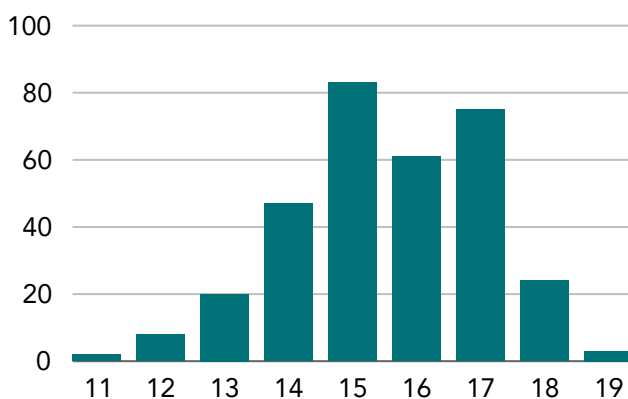
In FY23, Choice exceeded these goals, whereby



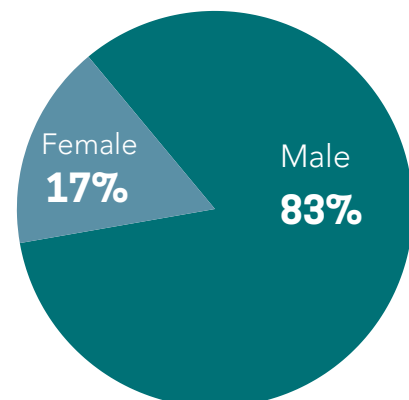
Race/Ethnicity



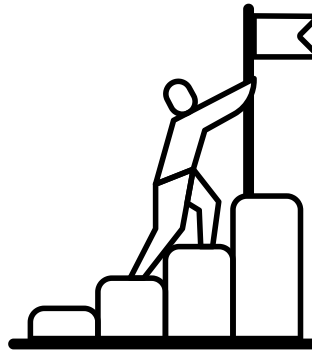
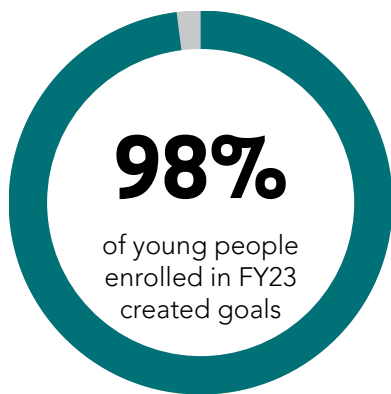
Age at Enrollment



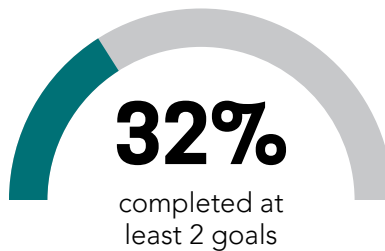
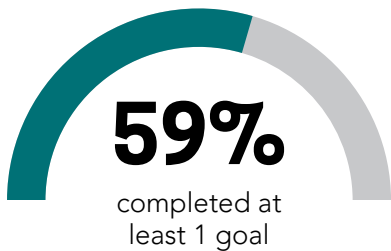
Gender



Supporting goal creation and attainment



231
youth created
goals completed



Connecting youth and families to resources



Choice engaged with
family members

5,022 times



Connected youth
and families with
community-based
resources

260 times

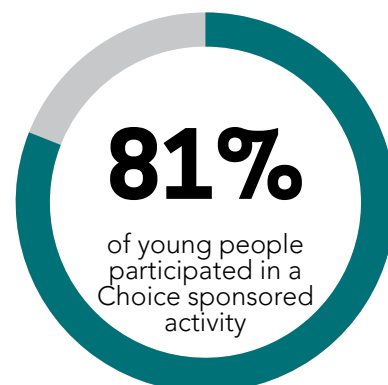
Providing enrichment activities



Choice youth received
a combined total of

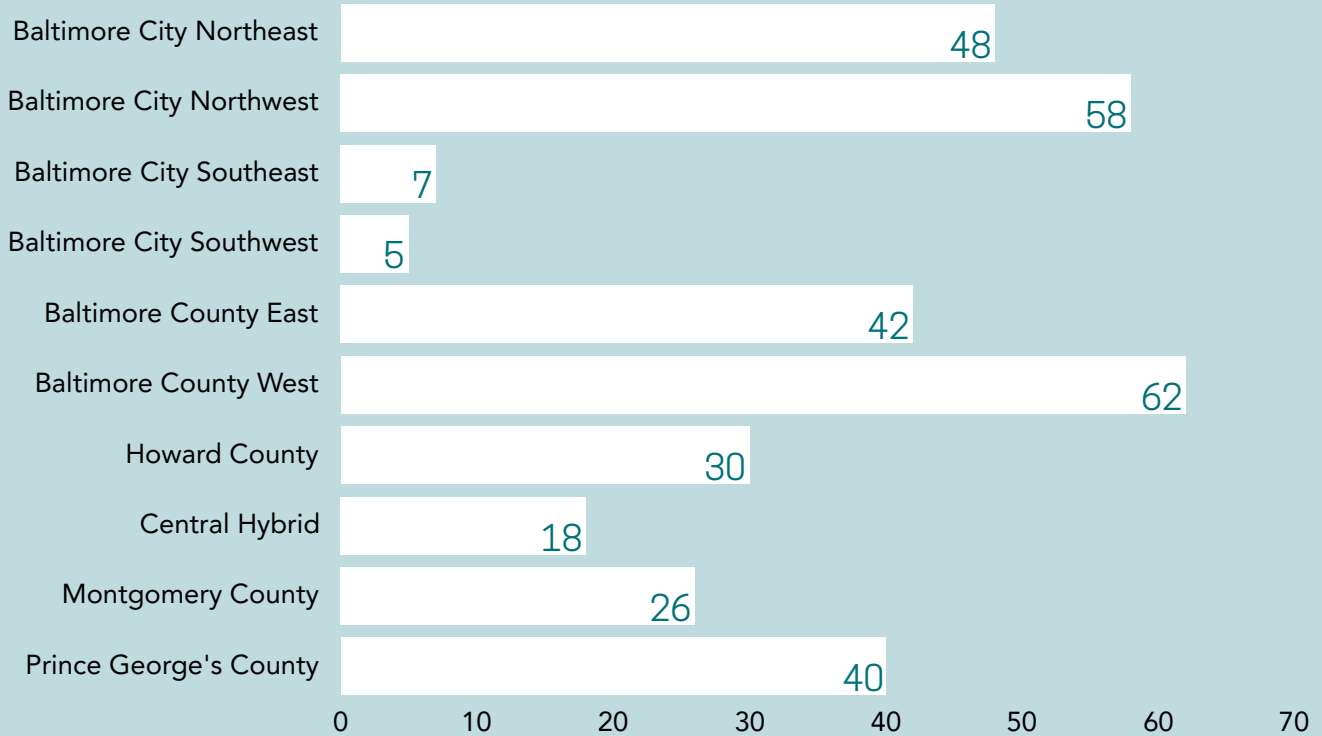
1,742

community service hours

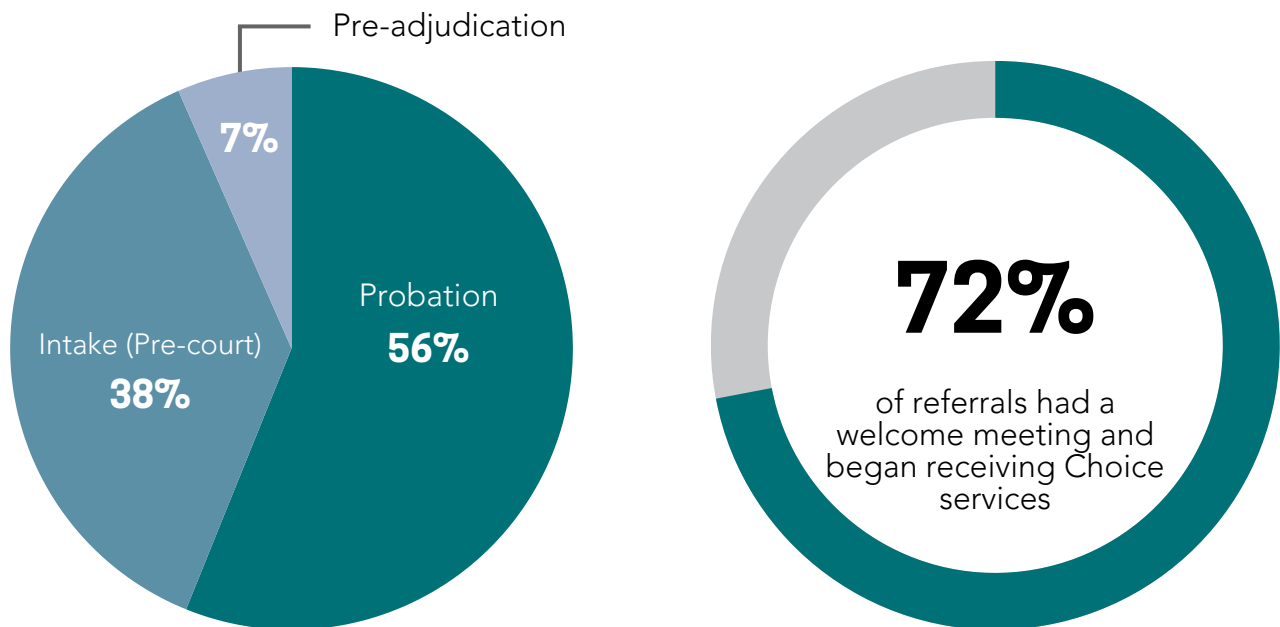


Intensive Advocacy Participant Enrollment

By Team



Referring Agency



CHOICE JOBS PROGRAM

The Choice Jobs program provided workforce training for young people, ages 10-24. The training consisted of a seven-session curriculum-based job readiness course. The Choice Jobs team also offered our workforce development curriculum in a virtual format for young people enrolled in Choice programs. Participants received a \$300 stipend upon completion.



Choice Jobs staff also conducted workshops with such new partners as Code in the Schools (CITs) and Living Classroom's Fresh Start program. Choice partnered with Taharka Brothers, another Baltimore-based business that aims to empower young people. Rysing Youth staff began scooping and serving ice cream at locations at both ends of Conway Street: in the Inner Harbor and at Oriole Park at Camden Yards.

Above: Antawn Morris and Marcus Randolph oversee day to day operations at the three social enterprises, including a stand at Oriole Park at Camden Yards, pictured here.

In FY23,



180

young people supported with their vocational goals



\$124,000

invested in youth and young adults' stipends and wages



60

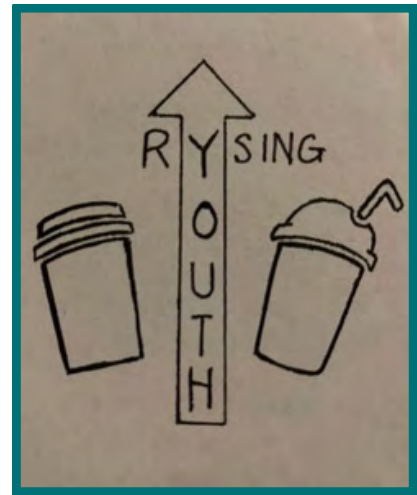
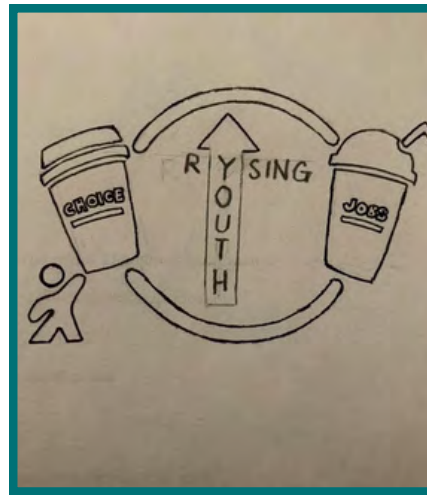
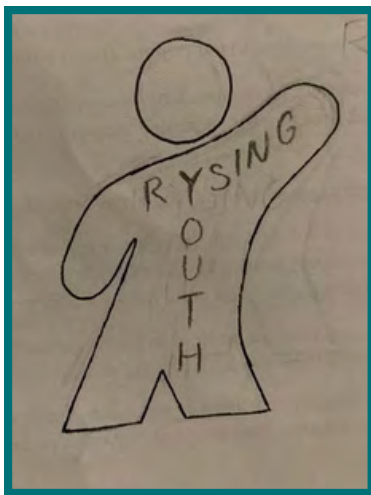
young people employed at our social enterprises

Rebranding



For 30 years, Choice's primary menu item was Flying Fruit (Fantasy) fruit smoothies. Georgia Martin, a local entrepreneur, was instrumental in the founding of Choice Jobs, initially at Memorial Stadium and in Harborplace. In 2022, we had the opportunity to pursue a new product and brand and to continue the same mission: to train and employ Baltimore's youth.

Rysing Youth emerged as the top pick for a new name: suggested by young people from the social enterprises and members of the Youth Advisory Board. Kiarra Williams, a graduate of Baltimore Design School and a staff member at the social enterprises designed the imagery.



We believe the first job is an essential experience for growth and development of a young person. Through our job training and career development, youth carve a unique pathway to employment success.

CHOICE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Choice's Education team provided learning and enrichment opportunities for young people in their schools and communities.

We believe that quality education does not always take place in the classroom and that all young people are capable of building strong college and career pathways that align with their goals.



College Night

University students hosted more than **60** youth for **16** College Nights at UMBC and Loyola University. Through their time together, students demystify the college experience and learn about young people's hopes, plans, and challenges. College Nights include a shared meal at the dining hall, enrichment activities, and basketball games or swimming sessions at the recreation center. University students organize STEM experiments, crochet lessons, and photography workshops, for example. It is an effort to build relationships and disrupt the school to prison pipeline, one egg drop at a time.

Left: Youth and mentors collaborated on an egg drop challenge. Teams created devices to protect eggs from a drop from up high.

Future Planning Club at Excel Academy

This series of workshops offered students opportunities for career, civic, and college exploration. Sessions introduced participants to SMART goal setting and deeper thinking about their future. Presentations included college options as well as admissions and FAFSA applications; resume building; career pathways; and voter registration. Featured speakers shared their pathways to positions in culinary and food services and trades; others spoke about publishing books and receiving Commercial Driver's Licenses (CDL).

Youth in Action (YIA)

Youth in Action promotes art as a tool for self expression and advocacy. Choice staff organized three workshops and one day-long event. Workshops included "Love Thy Skin," an afternoon of soap making; Zentangle, a meditative drawing exercise hosted by Art with a Heart; and poetry with Baltimore's Chicory and DewMore. These workshops culminated in celebration that included, food trucks, a photo booth, and making tie dye, mandalas, beaded bracelets, and tiles



Above: Mentors and youth collaborated during afternoon festivities at The Garage Baltimore.

Learner's Permit Testing

Staff organized a special testing event for **23** young people. MVA staff administered the official test one-on-one with an opportunity to retake immediately if the youth did not pass initially. Driver's licenses are one of the top goals youth set for themselves. Traditional testing at an MVA facility often presents a barrier.

Back to School Event

Staff organized an afternoon party for community members in August. More than **100** Cherry Hill neighbors attended. Choice distributed **167** backpacks with school supplies. People enjoyed lunch and activities such as crafts with The Arts Project. Choice-sponsored barbers from More than a Shop to give free haircuts. Representatives from community-based organizations tabled at the event. Elev8 discussed South Baltimore Adult High Schools while those from BARCS shared information about responsible pet ownership and cuddles with dogs. **Seventeen** Choice youth helped set-up, serve, and clean up, earning community service hours.

CHOICE PERSONNEL AND STAFFING



The personnel and staffing team organized a series of events to promote team building. **Pictured:** colleagues enjoy an afternoon of problem solving in an escape room.

Hiring Activity

As in the previous year, we felt the consequences of the Great Resignation and Great Reshuffle. Choice enjoyed years of stability because many staff colleagues began as AmeriCorps members. They advanced within the organization from one year of service to tenure as coordinators, assistant directors, and upper level management. It is exciting to note that colleagues carry their Choice experiences with them further in their careers in nonprofits, government employment, higher education; and into further education in graduate and professional schools. This year marked an unprecedented number of staff openings. During this period, we reviewed **417** applications and welcomed **22** new colleagues. The turnover offered fresh opportunities for growth and development.

We believe in holistic development, not only for the young people and families served by our organization, but also for AmeriCorps members and staff.

Community Building

The Personnel and Staffing team organized a series of self and community care team building sessions. Colleagues enjoyed a range of workshops from stretching during laughter yoga and problem solving in an escape room. A few activities were designed to address the interests and concerns of people of color. For example, after the prominent instances of state-sanctioned policy brutality in Memphis, Tennessee; anti-Asian mass shooting in Monterey Park, California; and public violence in Baltimore City.



New organizational structure and service delivery model

This year, after extended discussion and deliberation, we implemented a new staffing structure that aligns more closely with our model of youth-centeredness. Staff coordinators will now provide direct services to young people on their caseloads rather than supervising a team of AmeriCorps members.

Intensive Advocacy service coordinators now conduct welcome meetings, develop service plans and SMART goals, and work closely with the case managers at Department of Juvenile Services to support youth during their three to six month tenures with us. This will ensure a stronger continuity of services with more seasoned professionals. AmeriCorps members—as well as part-time mentoring interns—serve youth and their families in a supportive role, accompanying them to activities such as community service and College Nights.

All mentors are trained in Choice's evidence-informed intervention model. Ludley Howard, LCSW-C, LICSW, LCSW, of Pride Youth Services and The Howard Group, continues to lead workshops on Motivational Interviewing and Stages of Change. This year, Choice implemented a new training module Goal Planning Strategies designed by Carlo DiClemente, Ph.D, UMBC professor emeritus; Bronwyn Hunter, Ph.D, Columbia University Justice Lab; and UMBC Training Center's Habits Lab. DiClemente co-developed the Transtheoretical Model of behavior change, and has authored more than 150 scientific publications on motivation and behavior change. Hunter's research program and community work has focused on promoting health and well-being for people and communities who are indirectly and directly impacted by the criminal legal system.

TRUTH, RACIAL HEALING AND TRANSFORMATION

Choice operates with two theories of change. First, we believe that youth are best served in their communities supported by local resources. Second, we believe that we are developing the next generation of change agents. We take both goals seriously. Our university-based, community-committed institutional location emboldens these twin efforts. In order to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in the youth legal system and to prepare advocates committed to social justice, we must dismantle the legacy of white supremacy culture.

We are disrupting the historical and present repercussions of racism by:

- working against the impact of systemic inequities and individual prejudices and towards educating
- ourselves and community stakeholders on combating racial oppression;
- utilizing a meaningful community-engagement framework that is inclusive, person-centered, restorative, and culturally responsible;
- focusing on the human affective and relational work of race equity by creating positive spaces for dialogue, relationship-building, mutual respect, trust, and shared accountability.

In addition to his leadership of Choice, Eric Ford continued to play a leading role in American Association of Universities and Colleges nationwide initiative: Truth Racial, Healing and Transformation (TRHT). TRHT is Choice's equity based framework rooted in using storytelling and relationship building to change harmful narratives. Ultimately, the goal is to impact public policy. This year, he mentored leaders of new TRHT Centers at AAC&U's Summer Institute to implement and strengthen their campus initiatives. He co-facilitated healing circles in person and virtually for Montgomery County Government and dialogue sessions with Community Informed Policing World Café at Montgomery College. This is part of an ongoing effort to cultivate and strengthen community partnerships with and around UMBC at The Universities at Shady Grove. In an increased effort to extend our reach and impact at UMBC-USG, staff have participated in the campus' Black Lives Matter Working Group. The goal is to train facilitators and conduct racial healing circles there consistently in the future. More broadly, we hope to increase storytelling efforts and programming at USG in partnership with Montgomery College

Ford partnered with Zareen Taj, a Ph.D. student in the Language, Literacy, and Culture Program and colleague in The Shriver Center, to create a documentary called "Our Face Tells". Hosted by The Shriver Center at UMBC, this short documentary premiere took place on the first anniversary of the fall of Kabul and the Afghan government in 2021. Taj, advocate, author, speaker, and filmmaker, presented her new film with her long-time collaborator Jay Simpson and hosted a question and answer period. The film used the TRHT to draw attention to how Hazara women work toward healing themselves and their communities and transforming their society.

POLICY AND ADVOCACY

The principle of youth-centeredness requires that we seek solutions from participants in our programs. Mentors do this routinely during everyday interactions in one on one meetings and in group activities.

In October, staff and AmeriCorps members convened a formal discussion; the topic “What is Justice?” in keeping with the Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s theme for Youth Justice Action month.

When asked by their mentors, What can the city and the state do to prevent crime and support youth? They responded:

**More mentors before we get in trouble.
More programs where we can go to play.**

Choice staff amplifies the concerns of participants as we advocate for reforms at the local, regional, and state levels. We work with such alliances as the youth-led, Baltimore-based Youth as Resources’ School Police Accountability Roundtable; Coalition to Reform School Discipline; and Maryland Coalition for Justice and Police Accountability. Other efforts include regular organization-wide conversations about policy reform, one on one meetings with elected officials, as well as written and oral testimony.

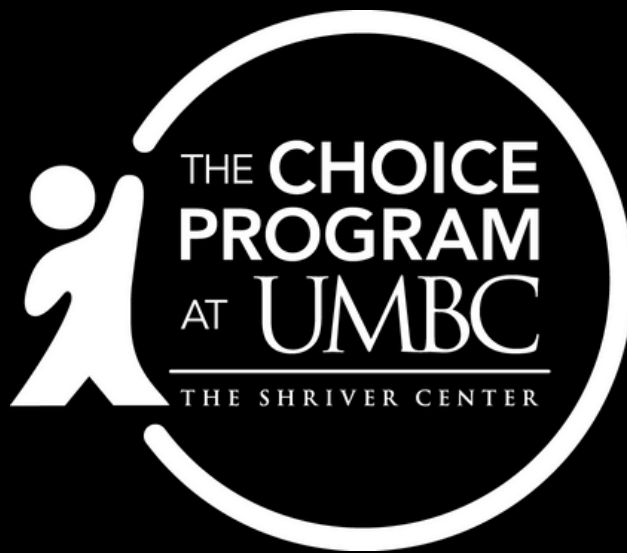


Above: In February, Choice staff and alumni joined the Maryland Youth Justice Coalition for a rally in Annapolis for the #YESAct Youth Equity and Safety Act

PARTNERS

Thanks to our funders and partners whose support enables us to offer high quality, high support services.





www.choiceprogram.org



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